

Lucky winner!

THE F.A. Cup history is littered with hard luck stories and Wycombe Wanderers added to the quota with a narrow first round defeat away to the Southern League side Maidstone on Saturday.

They dominated the match for long periods, but a failure to put away crucial chances, proved costly and it was the home side, forced on to the defensive for long periods, that went through to the next round.

There was an unsuspected touch of drama about the winning goal after 64 minutes. It came from a 25 yard free kick after Mick Holfield was unluckily penalised for dangerous kicking as Glen Aitken went for the ball.

Indirect

Aitken, Norman Fusco and Chris Kinnear went into a huddle discussing tactics — unaware that the referee had raised his arm to indicate that the free-kick was indirect.

INDIRECT FREE-KICK DEFLECTED BY KEEPER

Maidstone 1, Wycombe Wanderers 0

"I certainly didn't see the referee put his arm up," Aitken said later. "The three of us had a good look at the situation and decided someone should have a go."

"It was left to me, so I slammed it with my left foot as hard as I could. Fortunately, the goalkeeper touched the ball and it went into the top corner. I did not know until after the game that it was an indirect free-kick."

Maidstone manager Barry Watling confirmed the referee stated after the game that it was. So, had Peter Spittle, deputising for the injured John Maskell, not dived full length to fingertip the ball away, the goal would not have stood.

That shot was one of only

three that Spittle had to deal with during the whole match. His opposite number, Dickie Guy, on the other hand, fully earned his money after his recent £1,500 transfer from Wimbledon.

Outstanding

He made one outstanding save in each half. The first from Steve Long after 18 minutes had a touch of luck about it. Guy flung himself to his left, to deflect Long's shot on to the bar.

In the second half, he did well to stop a Steve Hardwick effort. "He had an outstanding game," said Mr Watling. "It was a complete change of fortune after his last game here. I would say

the Cup man came good again..."

Not for the first time Maidstone had good reason to thank Neil Merrick and Kenny Hill, playing with stitches in his gashed eyebrow, for the steady work at the heart of the defence.

Indeed, it was a game dominated by defences as Wycombe had certainly done their homework and completely blotted out the home side's leading scorer Glen Coupland, who hardly had a look-in.

Bad miss

In the last 25 minutes Wycombe strove all-out for an equaliser and came desperately close when Dylan Evans struck a post

from only five yards out after Hardwick had back-headed Paul Birdseye's long throw.

It was a bad miss which typified much of Wycombe's play in recent weeks. The situation did not improve when Stewart Atkins came on for Steve Long and Wycombe were once again left reflecting sadly on missed chances.

One Wycombe man to shine was the skipper Howard Kennedy, who produced his best performance of the season in midfield, where he was given a surprising amount of room.

Norman Fusco, the Maidstone player was booked in the first half for dissent, but there was little other trouble for the referee in a hard but sporting contest.

MAIDSTONE: D. Guy, C. Kinnear, W. Edwards, K. Hill, G. Aitken, N. Merrick, B. Gregory, G. Coupland, N. Fusco, A. Budden, P. Silvester. Sub: K. Wallace (not used).

WYCOMBE: P. Spittle, P. Birdseye, R. Davies, K. Mead, A. Phillips, S. Hardwick, D. Evans, M. Holfield, S. Long (Sub: S. Atkins 74 mins), H. Kennedy, T. Scott.

Referee: M. W. Sinclair (Guildford).
Attendance: 1,904.
Half-time: 0-0. **Scorer:** Maidstone: Aitken (64 mins).



Wycombe Wanderers players and officials in confident mood before boarding their coach to go on their long journey to Kent on Saturday morning. However, their high hopes were not turned into reality.